

Rep. Markey Opening Statement on Reconciliation
Energy and Commerce Committee
October 26, 2005

Last March, the Republicans passed a Budget Resolution that threatened to cut \$35 billion in the programs which protect the most vulnerable, including \$10 billion from Medicaid, while shoveling \$106 Billion out the door to the wealthiest Americans in the form of massive tax cuts.

Now it is our job to implement the plan, starting with up to \$15 billion from Medicaid. We are not here to do real Medicaid Reform and we are not here to have a real debate about how best to accomplish the digital television transition. We are here to carry out budget instructions intended to protect welfare for the wealthy by cutting more money from the poorest of the poor, the spectrum auction and ordinary consumers.

So as we consider the Republican proposals this week, we must remember where all of these “savings” are going; they are not going to improve Medicaid, or to protect consumers—they are going to tax cuts for millionaires.

With respect to the title addressing the digital television transition, let me start by saying that I agree on the desirability of bringing the digital television transition to a timely conclusion and the setting of a “date certain” for the cessation of analog television broadcasting. I also agree

upon the need to do so in order to assist public safety entities in obtaining much-needed, cleared frequencies for their vital public safety mission and to free up frequencies for other wireless uses, such as broadband wireless services.

But neither our public safety mission nor our DTV transition mission will be met if we pick a “hard date” for transition that we cannot make stick. Unfortunately, the Committee Print has done just that.

The core of any digital TV bill we approve should ensure that the government does not engage in the unconstitutional practice of taking private property without just compensation. I really don’t understand what has come over my Republican friends. They are proposing that we render millions of perfectly good televisions inoperable without providing a practical way of turning them back on. Essentially, this is a government-forced condemnation of private property, and I don’t believe my colleagues have thought through the ramifications of such an act.

Do they really want to set in motion a process that guarantees the millions of Americans will be tuning in expecting to watch a New Year’s Day college bowl game in 2009 only to see their tv set go dark? Do you really want to look back on this vote and say “I could have

provided you a remedy but chose to use that money instead to preserve the tax breaks of America's wealthiest citizens?" Let's be clear: Since the auction is expected to raise at least \$10 Billion, there's more than enough money to make all affected consumers whole who are unfairly blacked out by this policy imposed from the top down.

And the Republican plan puts the "hard date" in jeopardy – the fact it does not adequately address potential consumer outrage makes the "hard date" untenable. Any abrupt end date to the digital television transition will be difficult to implement. Yet it will be nearly impossible if consumers are not compensated when the government turns off the television upon which they may depend. For the elderly, the working poor, and for immigrant groups who speak foreign languages, the digital television transition may pose particular problems and contain greater risks.

So, if you are one of the millions of consumers who has an analog TV clicker in one hand, you'd better have your other hand on your wallet – because the Republican Congress is coming after both.

With respect to the Medicaid title, how are we to "reconcile" the fact that in order to find money for the Republican's tax cuts for wealthy

Americans we are asked to cut billions from a program that serves the lowest income Americans, the elderly and the disabled?

- Almost 60% of people in nursing homes are on Medicaid
- 1/3 of all babies who are born on Medicaid
- 8 million Americans with disabilities are on Medicaid

If we are going to cut Medicaid, it had better be because we HAD to, not because we CHOSE to.

And there is no doubt that Republicans have CHOSEN to rob Medicaid to maintain tax breaks for the rich.

I support doing real Medicaid reform. But let's not kid ourselves, this bill is not really about reforming Medicaid or thinking about the best ways to provide health care to our country's most vulnerable populations. This bill is about trying to decide who among the least fortunate in our country – the poor, the disabled, the seniors in nursing homes -- should pay for wealthy American's tax cuts.

This is not a budget decision, this is a moral decision.

- We will be judged by the outcome of this debate.

- We will be judged by how we take care of the least of our people.
- We will be judged by our decision to turn our backs on those Americans who cry out for HELP.

I urge my colleagues to reject calls to cut up to \$15 billion or more from Medicaid to give comfort to the comfortable in the form of enormous tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans.